

White House Conference on Aging Independent Aging Agenda Event

Post-Event Summary Report Georgia Event 5 of 5

Name of Event: Georgia Council on Aging
July 2005 Independent Aging Agenda Event

Date of Event: July 14, 2005

Location of Event: Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw, GA

Persons Attending: 45

Sponsoring Organizations: Georgia Council on Aging, Georgia Division of Aging Services,
Georgia Association of Area Agencies on Aging, Georgia
Gerontology Society

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WHCoA Agenda Item Planning Along the Lifespan

Selected Topics: Economic Incentives to Increase Retirement Savings

■ Priority Issue # 1:

Economic Security

Description:

Older Georgians and providers of services to older Georgians continue to dialog about the need to shore up the financial security of retirees through strengthening Social Security, encouraging pension and savings plans, supporting employment for older workers who wish to remain in the workforce and providing for affordable health care options.

Barriers:

- Solutions for strengthening Social Security are not uniformly supported; some support private accounts, some are opposed to private accounts.
- Some are not convinced that Social Security is really in crisis.

- Pension plans are being eliminated by companies when the company gets into financial trouble.
- It is unclear why health care costs continue to go up even when the cost of living is rising at a much slower pace for other goods and services.

Solutions:

- Convene an independent group to assess Social Security and to make recommendations for economic security for the coming generations.
- Recommend options for ensuring that pension plans remain solvent and continue to provide retirement income.
- Encourage employers to continue hiring older workers.
- Similarly, commission an independent study of health care costs and ways to curb the costs.
- Develop strategies to help people stay well longer to avoid health care services.

WHCoA Agenda Item Our Community

Selected Topics: Coordinated social and health services that give the elderly the maximum opportunity to age in place

■ Priority Issue # 2:

Encouraging Elder Friendly Communities

Description:

Planning our communities to provide for aging in place.

Barriers:

- Lack of pedestrian friendly infrastructure.
- Community planners do not consider older citizens in designing the community plan i.e. integrating housing and shopping, recreation, health care and other service providers in local neighborhood plans, and including in the community planning sidewalks, encouraging the use of alternative transportation to improve air quality, etc.

Solutions:

- Include money in the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act to encourage liveable communities in local planning activities.
- Highlight the benefits of liveable communities to all residents to encourage children and younger citizens to walk, use community transportation alternatives and consider the benefits of more mixed used development rather than isolated, cul-de-sac subdivisions miles from services.

WHCoA Agenda Item Health and Long Term Living

Selected Topics: Connection of evidence based research and comparative –effectiveness studies with the delivery of health, mental health and social services

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■ Priority Issue # 3:

Access to Mental Health Services

Description:

Good mental health is as important as good physical health for people of all ages. Depression and other mental illnesses are not always recognized by the patient or by their health care providers.

Barriers:

- Mental health services are fragmented and not available uniformly.
- Many individuals who may suspect a problem will not seek treatment because of the stigma that a mental illness diagnosis carries.
- Physicians and their staffs and other health care providers are not trained adequately to recognize and recommend treatments.
- The cost of mental health services is high and insurance does not always cover the needed therapies, treatments or medications.
- Mental illness can be more difficult to treat than physical illness because of the number and type of variables in each individual case.

Solutions:

- Media campaign to destigmatize mental illness.
- Empower older adults to talk about mental health issues and experiences.
- Provide for Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans Administration and other health care services payors to pay for case management, disease management and consultation services with patients and other health care providers to promote positive mental health outcomes.
- Educate health care providers about recognizing and treating mental illness.
- Promote screening for mental illness.
- Require that insurance plans cover mental health services.

■ Priority Issue # 4:

Promoting Nutrition and Physical Fitness

Description:

Maintaining good nutrition and physical fitness prolongs life and sustains a higher quality of life.

Barriers:

- Lack of education about nutritional needs of older adults.
- Lack of education about physical fitness opportunities.
- Failure to recognize and capitalize on the physical fitness opportunities that could be incorporated into play with grandchildren or other routine activities such as gardening.
- Lack of interest in food preparation for those who live alone and don't want to just cook for themselves.
- No significant incentives to be accountable for nutrition and physical fitness.

Solutions:

- Encourage insurance companies to provide incentives for insureds to participate in weight control.
- Include nursing home residents and other long-term care residents in planning for nutrition and physical fitness which can mitigate complications from chronic diseases.
- Consider transportation to fitness centers, shopping centers and other destinations that provide access to physical fitness and nutrition.
- Promote nutrition and food preparation classes and development of recipes for older adults to reinforce good nutrition habits.

WHCoA Agenda Item Social Engagement

Selected Topics: Exploring the roles of spirituality in aging

▣ Priority Issue # 5:**The Role of Spirituality in Aging****Description:**

- Spirituality plays an important role for many as we approach the end of life. At the middle of life we ask what is the meaning of life? At the end of life we ask different questions – am I known by God? Is God merciful?

Barriers:

- The requirement of separation of church and state seems to prohibit the development of public policies that could affect our spirituality, i.e. how we envision God or the Divine which is not the same as religion which we define as our relationship to God or to the Divine.

Solutions:

- Encourage freedom of religion not freedom from religion.
- Evidence based research shows that spiritual support results in positive outcomes for patients in hospitals; provide guidelines and support for spirituality in health care settings, at senior centers and in other settings.
- Recognize the importance of spirituality and its expression and make resources like transportation available for older adults to participate in their spiritual community.
- Encourage more discussion of the partnership of the faith community in providing services to older adults.